

McINNIS CANYONS NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA

Manager's Annual Report
Fiscal Year 2014

BLM

McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area • COLORADO

NATIONAL
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Table of Contents

1	McInnis Canyons Profile	2
2	Planning and NEPA	5
3	Year's Projects and Accomplishments	6
4	Science	11
5	Resources, Objects, Values, and Stressors	12
6	Summary of Performance Measures	18
7	Manager's Letter	19

1 McInnis Canyons Profile

Designating Authority

Designating Authority: Colorado Canyons National Conservation Area and Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness Act of 2000 (Public Law 106-535), October 24, 2000, renamed through Public Law 108-400, October 30, 2004

Acreage

Total Acres in Unit	BLM Acres	Other Fed. Acres	State Acres	Other Acres
123,460 acres	123,460 acres			

Contact Information

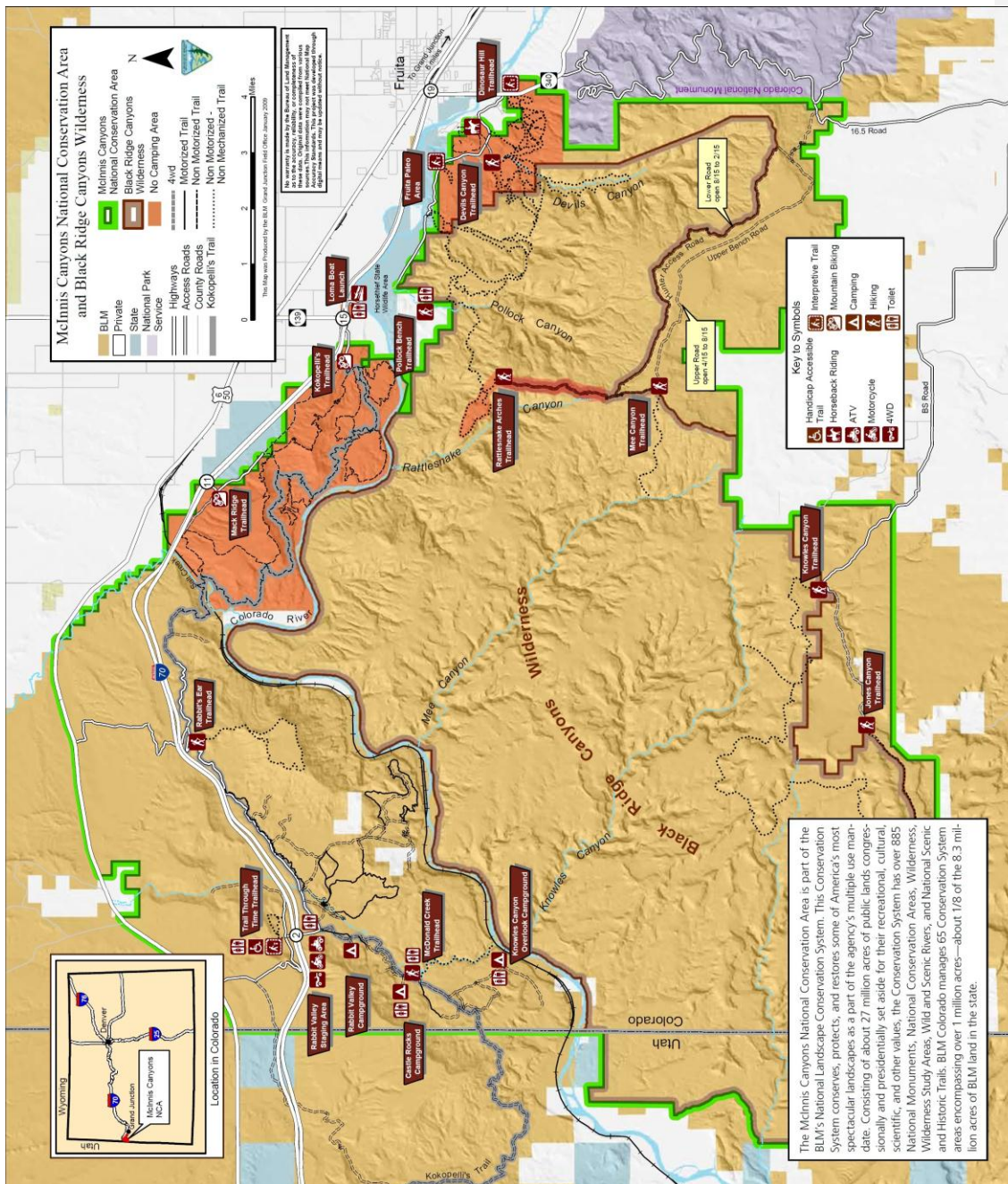
Unit Manager	Phone	E-mail	Mailing Address
Collin Ewing	(970) 244-3000	cewing@blm.gov	2815 H Road Grand Junction, CO 81506

Field Office	District Office	State Office
Grand Junction	Northwest	Colorado

Budget

Total FY14 Budget	Subactivity 1711	Other Subactivities' Contributions	Other Funding
\$680,000	\$529,000	1210 \$58,000 1110 \$19,000 1220 \$27,000 1020 \$11,000 3130 \$8,000	1232 Special Area SRP fee \$28,000

Map of McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area



Staffing

The permanent staff of the McInnis Canyons NCA (MCNCA) consists of an NCA manager (currently shared with Dominguez-Escalante NCA), a science ecologist (a joint position that also supports Gunnison Gorge and Dominguez-Escalante NCAs), a park ranger, a law enforcement officer (shared with Dominguez-Escalante NCA), and an outdoor recreation planner. In FY 2014, the seasonal staff included one river ranger and one administrative assistant (shared with the Grand Junction Field Office) to administer river permits.

The NCA receives special recreation permit administration, facilities maintenance and other program support from staff members in the Grand Junction Field Office, primarily in the areas of visitor services and contact, geology and paleontology, cultural resources, range management, wildlife biology, ecology, weed management, geographic information systems (GIS), and soil, water and air quality.



2 Planning and NEPA

Status of RMP

The Colorado (McInnis) Canyons National Conservation Area Approved Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision was completed in October 2004.

Status of Activity Plans

The 2004 RMP was very detailed. It included many of the components of an activity level plan. The RMP included travel management route designations, identified new routes to be constructed, identified gate placements, day use areas, parking areas, direction for posting visitor use information, outcomes, setting prescriptions, management and marketing actions, administrative and monitoring actions for each management zone.

A majority of these actions have been completed and additional needs have been identified in areas of high recreation use such as Ruby Horsethief Canyons and the Fruita Front Country. As a result two activity level planning efforts were completed in 2011-2012, and are now being implemented.

Ruby Horsethief Recreation Area Management Plan – December, 2011
Front Country Trails Plan - August, 2012

The RMP is now ten years old, so the Grand Junction Field Office has requested that the Washington Office conduct a plan review.

-Key recent NEPA Actions and/or Project Authorizations

Mike's Geology Trail

In FY 2014, the BLM completed NEPA and issued a decision to allow for 23 interpretive geology signs to be installed in Opal Hill and Devils Canyon. These signs were installed to offer visitors and local educators the opportunity to lead self-guided geology hikes within McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area.

28 Hole Grazing Permit Renewal

The BLM completed NEPA on the 28 Hole Grazing allotment to allow for grazing on 2,447 public land acres of which 663 acres is within McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area. The NEPA and Environmental Assessment were completed to determine the issuance of a 10 year grazing permit for livestock within this allotment.

3 Year's Projects and Accomplishments

General Accomplishments

Colorado Canyons 5th Annual Scavenger Hunt

In May 2014, Colorado Canyons Association (CCA) and BLM co-hosted the fifth annual scavenger hunt in McInnis Canyons NCA. During this event 350 third grade students from six District 51 schools visited several different stations to learn about the cultural and natural resources of the National Conservation Area.



Mesa County High School River Trip

In September 2014, BLM and Colorado Canyons Association and Adventure Bound Expeditions hosted a river trip for Central High School AP Environmental Studies class. During this trip we were able to educate 25 tenth-twelfth grade students about cultural and natural resources along the river. Students were able to spend the evening camping by the Colorado River and learned valuable skills such as how to dress for weather and insects, how to set up a tent, and leave no trace ethics including use of fire pans and portable toilet systems.



Restoration of Social Trails in Devils Canyons

In the spring of 2014 BLM recreation staff and Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado hosted a two day trail restoration project within Devils Canyons. Volunteers assisted with restoring three miles of user created trails back to their natural state. This project was very successful with almost sixty volunteers showing up to assist with this endeavor. Special thanks to the National Park Service Colorado National Monument for allowing the volunteers to use their campground.



Current Areas of Focus

McInnis Trail Maintenance Projects

In 2014, the Grand Junction Field Office recreation crew spent several days within McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area. During the spring and summer they were able to spend multiple days within the Rabbit Valley area doing a much need trail inventory. This inventory will help in creating an updated route system through the area. The crew also spent numerous days improving mountain bike trails in the Kokopelli/Mack Ridge areas.

Colorado River Restoration

The major areas of focus for the MC NCA in FY 2014 were improving and managing the river camping permit system and operating the NCA's highly successful volunteer and partnership programs to remove invasive plants and trash from along the riverfront and restore native cottonwood trees. These are ongoing, long-term programs that will continue well beyond the next fiscal year. In order to ensure retention of remaining and reestablished cottonwood galleries for campsite quality and wildlife habitat, BLM instituted fire restrictions along the Colorado River in the summer of 2014. While campfires were allowed in the remainder of the NCA, fire restrictions were needed along the river because of dense fine fuel loading and heavy recreation use.



Transporting Fremont Cottonwood trees down the Colorado River to plant.

Education, Outreach, and Interpretation

5th Annual third Grade Scavenger Hunt

In May of 2014, BLM and Colorado Canyons Association hosted another successful scavenger hunt for Mesa county third graders. The 350 students were able to attend this event and learn about cultural and natural resources within McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area. This event is made possible by many other local community members and businesses.

Mesa County High School River Trip

In September 2014, BLM and Colorado Canyons Association hosted Central High Schools AP Environmental Studies student on an overnight river trip. During this trip students were able to learn about cultural and natural resources of the NCA. Along with learning students were able to lend a hand in planting cottonwood trees on the banks of the Colorado River.

Trail Monitoring Class

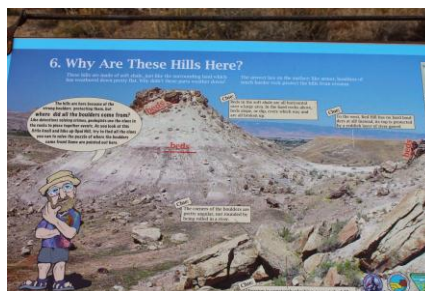
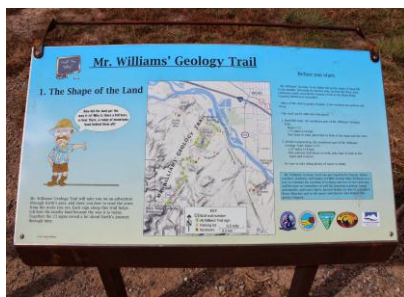
In the spring and fall of 2014 BLM recreation staff helped CCA to host our yearly trail monitoring class in Fruita, Colorado. During these training sessions volunteers learn what to look for when they are out monitoring trails within MCNCA. This year we had 23 individuals attend this informative workshop. These workshops and volunteers are essential to help BLM recreation staff stay informed on the condition of the trails within McInnis Canyons- NCA. Data collected will help BLM prioritize trail maintenance efforts.

Teacher on the Public Lands

In FY 2014, BLM was able to hire a Teacher on the Public Lands. During this 160 hour internship an elementary school teacher from the Dual Immersion Academy in Grand Junction- was introduced to the Bureau of Land Management mission and resources. As a result of this experience, the teacher developed a natural resources lesson plan that will be used to educate elementary students in the school district.

Mikes Geology Trail

In 2014, BLM approved the installation of Mike's Geology Trail. This interpretative hike consists of 23 panels in Opal Hill and Devils Canyon area. These signs were designed and installed in memory of local educator Mike Williams. Through the efforts of BLM staff and numerous volunteers, visitors and local educators will be able to lead self-guided geology hikes through McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area.



Partnerships

Western Colorado Conservation Corps

In September, under an eight-year-old partnership with the Western Colorado Conservation Corps, the BLM cut and treated tamarisk on the banks of the Colorado River. Partnering with the BLM allowed corps work crews to get hands-on experience with tamarisk control, herbicide application, river safety, and paddling.

Colorado Canyons Association

Colorado Canyons Association is the friends group to our local National Conservation Areas. In FY 2014, they have helped the BLM staff host river cleanups, trail monitor classes and educational trips for our area youth. In 2014 the NCAs expanded their partnership with CCA and added a new shared NCA Stewardship Coordinator position. As a CCA staff member Bryanna Kuhlman works at the front desk at the BLM office and helps to manage the NCA's volunteer, outreach, and educational activities for CCA and the BLM as well as managing the CCA bookstore and map sales at the BLM office.



Colorado Mesa University

In FY 2014, the MCNCA has partnered with Colorado Mesa University (CMU) for many different projects. This year CMU has continued many plant studies including Cheat grass monitoring and began a plant inventory for the NCA.

Other Partnerships

The MCNCA also closely collaborated with the Interpretative Association of Western Colorado, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Museum of the West, Geological Society of America, and School District 51.



Volunteers

Trail Monitoring

BLM partnered with Colorado Canyons Association and REI to host two trail monitoring classes within in McInnis Canyons. Through these classes we have been able to receive trail information from roughly 50 miles of trails and have logged over 225 hours of volunteer hours.

Colorado River trash removal

In August of 2014, the BLM partnered with Western Association to Enjoy Rivers for the tenth annual Colorado River cleanup. Over 70 volunteers participated to collect trash along the Colorado River through the City of Grand Junction just upstream of the NCA.

Kids Training Track Maintenance in Rabbit Valley

In November of 2014, the BLM and Stay the Trail hosted a work day to conduct much needed maintenance on the training track in Rabbit Valley within McInnis Canyons NCA. While out at Rabbit Valley volunteers also helped with sign repair and vegetation removal.

Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado

Tamarisk Removal

In Fall 2014, Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado and Centennial Canoe Outfitters teamed up to provide assistance in tamarisk removal along the Colorado River. Nineteen volunteers donated 918 hours of their time to remove and pile tamarisk

Devils Trail Restoration

In Spring 2014, Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado coordinated a two-day trail restoration project within Devils canyons. Sixty volunteers donated a total of 119 hours in restoring over three miles of user created trails within the NCA.

McInnis Canyons River Cleanup

BLM partnered with Colorado Canyons Association to host the 3rd annual McInnis Canyons River cleanup. Seventeen volunteers spent two days on the river and donated 272 hours of picking up trash on a 25 mile section of the river.

Recreation program volunteer hours

In FY 2014 volunteers participating in events sponsored by the BLM and partners logged a total of 3,392 volunteer hours



4 Science

Projects

McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area Plant Inventory

Colorado Mesa University (CMU) began a study of the plant species that comprise McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area. Through this study, CMU will create a checklist of plant species found within the NCA. In 2014, 100 acres of MCNCA was inventoried for this study. Once the study is finished the checklist can be shared with the public through CMU and BLM's websites for visitors to use.



Survey and Monitoring of bats

In 2014, a study of the bat species was started to increase information of bat species within the Grand Valley. Through this study Colorado Parks and Wildlife hope to learn about occurrence of roosting habitat of bats within the area. During this study approximately 40,566 acres of the NCA were monitored for bat species. This will be a two year assessment that will focus on a portion of MCNCA and the Colorado National Monument.

Detection of Cheat grass and other early season invasives

Deborah Kennard of Colorado Mesa University partnered with the BLM to do a study of invasive annual plants within McInnis National Conservation Area. This inventory will be completed using a technique called Detecting Early Season Invasive (DESI) to document landscape level dynamic-s. During 2014, five acres of the NCA were monitored using this technique.

Other ongoing scientific projects in the MCNCA

- Long term effects of wildfire on desert bighorn habitat
- Determining the origins of the Mygatt-Moore Dinosaur Quarry deposit and its fauna
- National rivers and streams assessment
- Gunnison sage-grouse Pinyon Mesa population models
- Using remote sensing to detect cheat grass and other early season invasives in the Colorado National Monument and MCNCA
- A survey of the species composition and distribution of bryophilous tardigrades in the high desert.



Tardigrade- Image Credit- Eye of Science

5 Resources, Objects, Values, and Stressors

Natural and cultural resources, including biological and environmental values

Natural and cultural resources are among the purposes of the McInnis Canyons NCA that are listed in its enabling legislation, and the NCA enjoys an extraordinary abundance of these resources, including an array of rare and common plant and animal species as well as prehistoric and historic sites and artifacts.

The BLM is committed to conserving, protecting and restoring the unique values of the NCA and furthering the goals of the BLM's National Conservation Lands, of which the NCA is a part. The NCA's natural and cultural resource management staff focuses on clearly communicating the importance of conserving and protecting NCA values and expanding the BLM's understanding of NCA resources through assessment, inventory and monitoring.

Accomplishments

In FY 2014, our GeoCorps intern was able to create a GIS model to help show low, medium and high probability of finding cultural site densities. Using this model BLM archaeology staff was able to focus their survey efforts and found site that contained a Ute wikiup village with 37 structures. Our findings will be presented at the 2015 Society for American Anthropology annual meeting in San Francisco, CA.



GeoCorps intern Lucy Harrington records remnants of a Ute wikiup.

Status and Trend Table

Resource, Object or Value	Status	Trend
Cultural (Includes archaeological and historical)	Good	Stable
Natural	Good	Stable
Biological	Good	Stable
Environmental	Good	Stable

Inventory, Assessment, Monitoring Table

Resource, Object, or Value	Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY 14
Cultural (includes archaeological and historical)	123,000	21,234	1126	16
Natural	123,000	123,000	123,000	40,671
Wildlife	123,000	65,252	123,000	40,566

Stressors Affecting Natural and Cultural Resources

Stresses on natural and cultural resources and values include (human-caused) wildland fire, invasive plants, recreational use, livestock grazing, domestic livestock diseases, loss of habitat, right-of-way proximity, air pollution, non-native animals, water pollution, theft, surface disturbance, vandalism, and increased access.

Water, soil and air resources, including natural and environmental values

Nineteen miles of the Colorado River flow through the McInnis Canyons NCA, and all the side canyons have seasonal flows resulting from snowmelt and summer rainstorms. These aquatic resources are important to fish and wildlife, and the river is popular with visitors for boating and camping. BLM staff members in this program area work to expand understanding of these resources through assessment, inventory and monitoring.

Status and Trend Table

Resource, Object or Value	Status	Trend
Water Resources	Good Overall	Stable and improving
Soil Resources	Good Overall	Stable and Declining
Air Resources	Good	Stable

Inventory, Assessment, Monitoring Table

Resource, Object, or Value	Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY 14
Water Resources	123,000	123,000	1,000	0
Soil Resources	123,000	123,000	123,000	0
Air Resources	123,000	123,000	123,000	0

Stressors Affecting water, soil and air resources

Water resources may be threatened by invasive aquatic plants, recreational use, improper livestock grazing, and air and water pollution.



Recreational resources, including wilderness and scenic values

Recreation is listed as one of the purposes of the NCA in its enabling legislation, and visitors to the NCA can participate in an exceptionally wide variety of recreational activities, including world-class mountain biking, river rafting, hiking, camping, hunting, horseback riding, off-highway vehicle (OHV) travel and wildlife viewing. Visitors can also enjoy a broad range of recreational settings, including remote wilderness, riparian wetlands and culturally or historically significant sites. The 142-mile Kokopelli Trail runs through the NCA to Moab, Utah, and the Colorado River winds its way for 19 miles through the spectacular canyon country of the NCA.

The BLM's recreation staff assists in planning for and managing recreational resources and facilities in a manner that conserves National Conservation Lands and NCA values. Thus, roads and other facilities are built only when necessary for public health and safety, for exercise of existing rights, to minimize impacts to resources, or to otherwise further the purposes for which the NCA was designated. Recreation staff members actively engage stakeholders through the land-use planning process to help identify existing and potential uses that are compatible with the legislated purposes of the NCA, and the BLM practices a community-based approach to providing recreational services that is consistent with the purposes of the NCA and the socioeconomic goals of adjacent or nearby communities.

Status and Trend Table

Resource, Object or Value	Status	Trend
Recreational	Good	Stable
Wilderness	Good	Stable
Scenic	Good	Stable

Inventory, Assessment, Monitoring Table

Resource, Object, or Value	Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY 14
Recreational	123,000	123,000	123,000	123,000
Wilderness	123,000	123,000	76,000	40,566
Scenic	123,000	123,000	123,000	0

Stressors Affecting recreational resources

Recreational resources and values may be adversely affected by any of the stressors that affect natural and cultural resources, because recreational visitors to the NCA often go there expecting (for example) to see pristine habitat, healthy wildlife, or undamaged rock art. Recreational use itself can damage recreational resources, especially with increased use due to local and regional population growth. With increased use of public lands, user interactions can also influence recreation experiences. Some interactions can be positive which would enhance an experience, while some can be negative degrading an experience. Right-of-way proximity and air pollution may also threaten the integrity of the recreational experience.



Scientific, geological, and paleontological resources

The scientific resources of the McInnis Canyons NCA are cited in its enabling legislation as one of the purposes for its designation, as are the geological, cultural, paleontological, biological and wildlife resources, all of which are suitable for scientific study and abundant in the NCA. Scientific study of these resources benefits the scientific community as a whole and effectively informs the BLM's management of the NCA. The NCA staff works to identify research needs, encourage science partnerships and citizen science, and incorporate scientific results into management, decision-making, and outreach.

BLM staff members promote the NCA to universities and research institutions as an outdoor research and educational laboratory and potential demonstration center for emerging technology and innovative management practices. In turn, academic institutions, aware of the unique and valuable resources in the NCA, seek out partnerships with the BLM to conduct scientific research and education in the NCA.

Status and Trend Table

Resource, Object or Value	Status	Trend
Scientific	Good	Stable
Geological (Precambrian to Quaternary rocks)	Good	Stable
Paleontological (Scientifically important vertebrate fossils)	Good Overall	Some vandalism, but stable overall

Inventory, Assessment, Monitoring Table

Resource, Object, or Value	Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY 14
Scientific	123,000	123,000	123,000	40,671
Geological	123,000	123,000	10,4550	0
Paleontological	123,000	10,5085	50	9

Stressors Affecting Scientific, geological and paleontological resources

Scientific resources are affected by anything that affects geological, cultural, paleontological, biological, or wildlife resources. Geological and paleontological resources are primarily affected by theft and vandalism



Wildlife education

Wildlife education is one of the purposes of the NCA listed in its enabling legislation, and the BLM strives to provide young people with opportunities to engage in recreation and practice stewardship on NCA lands and to learn about NCA resources and land management. BLM staff members seek out partnerships with local schools and educators to help them interpret National Conservation Lands and NCA values, and the BLM provides interpretive and educational materials to NCA users through the Grand Junction Field Office and the NCA website.

Accomplishments

In FY 2104, we were able to host a scavenger hunt for Mesa County third grade classrooms. At this event we are able to teach students about local birds and mammals located within the National Conservation Areas. The BLM was also hosted 25 Central high school on river trip where they were able to learn about river and wildlife ecology.

Status and Trend Table

Resource, Object or Value	Status	Trend
Wildlife Education	Good	Stable

Inventory, Assessment, Monitoring Table

Resource, Object, or Value	Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY 14
Wildlife Education	123,000	123,000	123,000	100

Stressors Affecting Wildlife Education

Risk factors for wildlife (and thus wildlife education) include loss of habitat, right-of-way proximity, non-native animals, and increased access



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6 Summary of Performance Measure

McInnis Canyons NCA-estimated resources status and trends, FY 2014		
Resource, Object, or Value	Status	Trend
Cultural (includes archaeological and historical)	Good	Stable
Natural	Good	Stable
Biological	Good	Stable
Environmental	Good	Stable
Water resources	Good overall	Stable and improving
Soil resources	Good overall	Stable and declining
Air resources	Good	Stable
Recreational	Good	Stable
Wilderness	Good	Stable
Scenic	Good	Stable
Scientific	Good	Stable
Geological (Precambrian to Quaternary rocks)	Good	Stable
Paleontological (Scientifically important vertebrate fossils)	Good overall	Some vandalism, but stable overall, with fossil being and excavated from Mygatt-Moore.
Wildlife Education	Good	Stable

7 Manager's Letter

Most westerners would agree that public lands are an important part of their life, and I'd venture to guess that for every ten people you ask *why* public lands are important to them, you would get at least seven different answers. In my conversations with members of this community I often hear that things such as mountain biking, hiking, boating, ranching, natural gas, hunting, and solitude are people's favorite public land benefits. Scientific discoveries usually don't make many folks' initial list, but when I dig deeper into the conversation most people agree that the scientific values of our National Conservation Lands are indeed highly pertinent in today's world. The designation legislation for both of the National Conservation Areas that I am blessed to oversee identified the "scientific" value of the areas as one of the purposes for which the conservation areas would be managed.



The BLM National Conservation Lands ecologist and science coordinator for Colorado is Dr. Nikki Grant-Hoffman. Nikki has done an amazing job of coordinating the scientific research that takes place in the NCAs. We have some very exciting studies on-going in the NCAs. Some of which are touched on in this year's NCA Manager's reports

One ongoing project is a study of *tardigrades*, microscopic organisms that rival any Disney character in their charisma and their ability to persevere in extreme conditions. Exciting studies on bighorn sheep and their behavior and habitat will help land managers make better decisions throughout the west regarding wildland fire, recreation, and livestock grazing. Studies examining salt desert ecosystem restoration techniques may help ecologists crack the code to restoring degraded areas in one of the most challenging and fragmented vegetation types in the semi-arid west. Social science research will help outdoor recreation professionals better gather and understand public land user preference to improve recreational experiences and opportunities that contribute to the health of western communities.

The studies I listed are only a few of the valuable projects going on in the NCAs that could lead to significant scientific discoveries. Other research projects on topics such as prairie dogs, bats, and paleontology will improve our ability to make informed decisions about responsible use of public lands and could lead to scientific breakthroughs that are relevant worldwide.

Next time you set foot on your public lands, I challenge you to discover your inner scientist. Admire the natural wonders around you; they hold the keys to find the answers to many of our most important questions, even ones we haven't thought of yet.

-Collin Ewing, NCA Manager



**NATIONAL
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National Conservation Area
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Phone: (970) 244-3000
<http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/nca/mcnca.html>

